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From Iron
Mountain

A Spasm of Gullibility

By Laurence Stern

National Editor of The Washington Post

THE MYSTERY OF IRON MOUNTAIN, one of Washington's most titillating literary guessing games in many an autumn book list, has finally been solved. The author of this work, which has spread a trail of snickers and befuddlement through this gullible capital, is none other than Leonard C. Lewin, New York journalist. He wrote the introduction, he admits, but denies that he wrote the entire book. However, some of his closest friends have tattled on him.

Even though the mystery is dispelled, some of the public and private brouhaha generated by this delightful satirical work is worth the retelling.

For example, late last month—as the event can be best fixed in time—galley proofs of The Report found their way into the office of Walt W. Rostow, Presidential Special Assistant for National Security Affairs. The White House had received tense queries from within the Government about the origins of the document which propounded unspeakable, if not unthinkable, heterodoxies on the large issues of war and peace.

The gravity of the problem facing the President's National Security Advisers cannot be exaggerated. Here was a report that presumably had been chartered at the highest Government level. It purported to represent the views of the Nation's 15 most eminent scholars. And of course the entire enterprise was of such transcending importance that it was anonymous. Here were some of the conclusions:

- "... lasting peace, while not theoretically impossible, is probably unattainable; even if it could be achieved it would almost certainly not be in the best interest of a stable society to achieve it.

- "... war has provided both ancient and modern societies with a dependable system for stabilizing and controlling national economies."

- "... the permanent possibility of war is the foundation for stable government; it supplies the basis for general acceptance of political authority."

And so on.

The White House, through Rostow's staff, conducted an inquiry into the authenticity of The Report. The National Security Advisers concluded, gratefully we might suspect, that it was a spurious work. Word was quietly passed within the White House and to those concerned sectors of the Executive Branch. Washington, once again, breathed more easily.

Nonetheless Iron Mountain became the subject of excited press speculation. It was acclaimed in the Wall Street Journal as an outstanding sample of the new genre of pseudonymous literature; a form of writing that flowers in times of political adversity—or even exile—for the pseudonymous author. (cf. A Political Fable by Bailey Laird, New Yorker magazine). The Iron Mountain Secu-

BOOK REVIEW

'Report from Iron Mountain on the Possibility and Desirability of Peace'

Introductory material by Leonard C. Sewin
(Dial, 109 pp., \$5).

rity Corp. issued a press release denying that its New York State vaults were ever used by any such group as were described in The Report.

The only claim of substance for The Report's authenticity was made last Sunday in Book World magazine by the eminent psychometrist, Herschel McLandress, who confines the truth of his private identity—John Kenneth Galbraith, economist—to a tiny circle of relatives and friends in Cambridge, Mass. Clearly, though, what McLandress would avow Galbraith would, perforce, deny.

The plain fact is that if Lewin had not written The Report with tongue in cheek then someone else would have belabored it into existence in traditional think-tank style—perhaps Herman Kahn, the Ponderosa of unthinkable thoughts about nuclear war and peace. Kahn is director of the Hudson Institute, which lies in the environs of Iron Mountain.

Lewin's bogus report is such a rich spoof of the prose of the Doomsday philosophers that the temptation to quote is irresistible. Here is The Report on one alternative to warfare:

"Another possible surrogate for the control of potential enemies of society is the reintroduction, in some form consistent with modern technology and political processes, of slavery." In the same vein the Iron Mountain peace planners suggest the development of "blood games"—large scale human sacrifices designed to contain anti-social aggressive impulses. "Such a ritual might be socialized," the Special Study Group asserts, "in the manner of the Spanish Inquisition."

The Report, down to its last footnote, is one of the finest pieces of social satire produced in this era of systems-analysis, war games, peace games and apocalyptic fun and games. It is so good because it is so plausible, as witness the spasm of gullibility it inspired at the White House.

The application of systems-analysis to the bureaucratic quagmire of the Pentagon has been properly acclaimed as one of the heroic feats of modern managerial history. Lewin imaginatively extends the technique to the problem of eliminating war and regulating an entire society.

In doing so, he puts us on the merry road to hell.

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